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ABSTRACT

A group supervision component is an integral part of the Wheelock College Graduate Program for teacher interns who work with special needs children. The group meetings evolved in response to four observed developments: (1) Common issues characterized the role of the intern regardless of school placement; (2) Interns had common learning needs; (3) Common developmental trends characterized the changing needs of the interns; and (4) Interns recognized a growing need to meet with their peers. In the course of the monthly meetings, supervisors observed the changing roles of group participants. The growing leadership abilities of group members changed the role of the supervisors from that of leader to facilitator, and finally to model group member, allowing interns to serve as discussion planners and leaders. It was found that, by participating as a member and leader within the group, the interns could prepare for their roles as educational liaisons between schools and families of special children, particularly in terms of learning to lead parent groups. Interns found group support, sharing, and exchanging of ideas and strategies essential to their professional growth. (JD)

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GROUP SUPERVISION

by

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Teaching Young Children With Special Needs
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TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Curriculum 570, Wheelock College Graduate School

This program is designed for persons who wish to pursue an intensive course of study focused on preschool children with moderate to severe special needs (e.g., developmentally disabled, emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, physically handicapped) who are located in integrated and self-contained public and private settings. The program combines the development of theoretical knowledge and skills with practical experience working with children with special needs.

The program's principal elements are:

- A year-long internship with young children in one classroom/ center with professional support and supervision. Each student will commit approximately one-half of his or her time to this internship, which provides daily contact with children and involvement in all aspects of their educational planning, including working with the children's parents.
- A multidisciplinary approach to children with special needs through the study of allied disciplines (e.g., pediatrics, speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, psychology, social work, expressive therapies).
- Training in individualized curriculum development with substantive work in assessment, goal setting, and teaching methods.
- Courses that examine deviations in child development and refine skills in the observation of young children and their environments.
- A choice of electives to build on each student's particular interest or needs.

Student competencies are developed in the roles of evaluator, planner, teacher, and communicator. Graduates of this program are qualified for a variety of positions, including head teacher in a self-contained or mainstreamed preschool program, consulting resource teacher to day care centers, head teacher in a collaborative or clinical setting, and consultant to community preschool or parent-involvement programs. Full-time students begin coursework the last week in June, and can complete the program requirements in two summers and one academic year. Part-time enrollment is also available.

Summer School I

Ed. 506	Observation of Young Children and Their Learning Environments	3 credits
Ed. 540	Development and Deviations in Early Childhood	3 credits

Semester I

Ed. 541-542	Multidisciplinary Approach to Children with Special Needs	3 credits
Ed. 678-679	Internship in Special Education: Teaching Young Children with Special Needs	5 credits
Ed. 680-681	Individualized Curriculum Planning for Children With Special Needs	3 credits
Elective		3 credits

Semester II

Same as Semester I	14 credits

Summer School II

Electives	6 credits

Recommended Courses:

Ed. 507	Infant and Toddler Behavior and Development	3 credits
Ed. 524	Language Acquisition	3 credits
Ed. 530	The Infant at Risk	3 credits
Ed. 531	Evaluation of Learning in Young Children	3 credits
Ed. 532	Group Climate: Positive Approaches to Children's Behavior	3 credits
Ed. 538	Emotional Disturbances in Young Children	3 credits
Ed. 539	Learning Disorders in Young Children	3 credits
Ed. 544	Movement and Thinking	3 credits
Ed. 569	Working with Parents of Children with Special Needs	3 credits
Ed. 591	Children Under Stress	3 credits
Ed. 606	Teaching Young Children with Severe Special Needs	3 credits
Ed. 710	The Consultation Process	3 credits

GROUP SUPERVISION

Background

In recognition of both the shared needs and combined expertise of its graduate interns, the Wheelock College Graduate Program, Teaching Young Children with Special Needs, offers a group supervision component in addition to its intensive individual supervision model. This aspect of our program allows for sharing among interns which might otherwise be missing due to the rigorous demands of both the internship and their course schedules.

Between 1976 - 1978, the first two years of the program, each supervisor met with her intern group approximately three times during each academic year. These meetings evolved in response to four significant developments. First, as supervisors became familiar with each internship site, they began to identify common issues which characterized the role of the intern regardless of placement. Second, as supervisors worked over time with more students, they began to identify the interns' common learning needs. Third, after supervising for an entire year, supervisors were able to identify common developmental trends which characterize the changing needs of any intern as he or she experiences entry into the internship, growing responsibilities within the placement, and exit from the year-long teaching experience. And finally, as interns acclimated themselves to their sites and to each other, they themselves began to recognize a growing need to meet with their peers. This need was cited over and over again in the end-of-year reports submitted by each program graduate. After several years of trial and growth, a formalized model of monthly (from October through May) group supervision meetings evolved and became an integral part of the year-long internship.

Logistics

The logistics of group supervision vary among supervisors and across time. While each meeting lasts for approximately two and one-half hours, some are scheduled during the day and others in the evenings. The evening meetings are always combined with a pot luck dinner which precedes the group discussion. The sizes of the groups also vary depending on the ratio of interns to supervisors each year. Typically, one supervisor works with eight interns while the other works with six interns. While most meetings occur on the Wheelock campus, occasionally groups have met at the homes of other interns and supervisors.

Except for the initial meeting in October, the agendas for many of the discussions are set by the group at the end of the previous month's meeting. Occasionally, issues of common concern arise during the interim between meetings, and, in these cases, the structured agenda is either altered or expanded. A number of meetings are more open in terms of agenda. These less structured sessions facilitate discussion of immediate needs and issues. Notes from each meeting are distributed, by the supervisor, to all group members during the week following each meeting. Although the issues discussed at the meetings sometimes vary across groups, the principles guiding topic selection remain consistent. Central among these principles is the firm belief that the interns themselves are the best resources for determining the content of the meetings.

Group Supervision as a Year-Long Process

Several trends characterize the year-long group supervision process. One of the most significant of these involves the changing roles of group participants. While the supervisor acts as the group leader during the fall meetings, she slowly relinquishes this role during the winter when she

becomes much more a facilitator than a director. Finally, during the spring, the supervisor takes the role of a model group member while allowing each intern to serve as a discussion planner/leader. These changes correspond to the growing comfort and competence of the interns, who themselves begin to take on leadership responsibilities during the group supervision meetings and, finally, even serve as primary planners. By modeling the roles of director, facilitator and group member, the supervisor allows participants to actively learn how to plan group meetings, how to initiate and sustain group discussion, how to listen to and support group members, and how to engage in group problem solving.

The growth of leadership abilities among the group participants is primarily dependent upon the sense of group trust which slowly emerges during the fall. When interns come to identify the group as a meaningful support system, they are then able to explore their own teaching concerns and problems within the group context. This involves healthy risk-taking which can only occur in a non-threatening atmosphere. As the interns successfully engage in group problem solving. they become more able to take the ultimate risk of shouldering primary responsibility for an entire group session. Much of the supervisor's energy is directed toward facilitating and sustaining the group trust necessary for the growth of leadership among intern participants.

Just as participant roles change over the course of the year, so do the issues interns identify for group discussion. During the fall, group supervision meetings focus on issues of staff communication. Each intern, as a member of a multidisciplinary team at his or her site, has initial concerns regarding both the role of a full-time intern and the role of a special educator on a service-delivery team. Interns exchange information about

their sites' role expectations and responsibilities as well as their sites' communication patterns. Those who are experiencing difficulties seek support and suggestions from their peers. Interns report that one invaluable result of these meetings is the recognition that their initial feelings of confusion and anxiety are universal and realistic responses to beginning an intensive year-long internship. These early meetings serve even more as builders of confidence than as information resources. The interns encourage each other to participate at their site staff meetings and to professionally voice their concerns when communication problems arise. It is also during this phase that strong allegiance to the group is established.

Discussion topics for the long, middle phase of group supervision include:

1. working with parents;
2. illness and death of pupils;
3. behavioral intervention;
4. foster care;
5. institutionalization;
6. curriculum: methods and materials;
7. the process of becoming a head teacher; and,
8. relationships between teacher attitudes and teacher behavior toward individuals and groups of children.

These sessions are used as information resources and as forums for group problem solving.

It is also during the middle phase of group supervision that interns begin to play leadership roles in planning and facilitating discussions. One example has been the sessions on childhood death that occurred during the 1978-79 and 1979-80 academic years. During each of these years, one or several interns had most unfortunately experienced deaths in their classrooms. These students agreed to lead group supervision meetings on this difficult topic. In each case, the leading intern met with his or her supervisor and other college faculty, read and compiled a list of resources, established an

agenda, brought relevant materials to the evening meeting, and led the discussion. Supervisors were struck by the preparedness and sensitivity of these interns who each later reported that this process had been of invaluable assistance in coping with their recent losses.

Participating as a member and leader within the group also serves as a modeling experience which helps prepare interns for their roles as educational liaisons between schools and families, particularly in terms of learning to lead parent groups. The group supervision process makes interns aware of and sensitive to issues of entrance into a group, stating needs, responding to and supporting others, enhancing the dynamics of interaction, raising issues for future agendas, using the group for mutual problem-solving, and dealing with termination. In addition, the above gains which accrue to this modeling experience also apply to enhancing the interns' ability to serve as a member and leader of a multidisciplinary staff team.

As interns prepare to enter the second half of the year-long internship, one group supervision is devoted to evaluating the supervision process and planning supervision goals for the second semester. Although individual goal-setting is largely a function of individual supervision, sharing goals often helps to focus peers on new learning objectives. Interns share both their supervision triumphs and their suggestions for changes and additions with their quietly listening supervisor.

During the final phase of the year, interns use group supervision as a means of support for dealing with termination. Evaluation has shown these meetings to be critical aids as interns negotiate this important step toward growth as teachers. Specifically, the actual termination of group

supervision allows the interns to practice saying good-bye to their children and site colleagues in a supportive atmosphere. The sadness of termination, the joy of new-found competence, and the immediate challenge of finding employment are all explored within this supportive group environment. On the practical side, one group meeting (usually in early April) includes a presentation and discussion led by a Wheelock Career Planning Counselor.

Relationships Between Group and Individual Supervision

The relationships between group and individual supervision are central to the success of either process. All interns are expected to master the same basic skills outlined in our program's competencies. These competencies are divided into the four major professional roles of evaluator, planner, teacher and communicator. However, interns vary along several dimensions; among these are educational background, amount and kind of previous teaching experience, and individual goals and priorities. In addition, while all of our internship sites share in the quality of excellence, each serves a unique population of children and has a somewhat unique curriculum model. Individual supervision is, among other things, a response to the unique needs of each intern. Group supervision, on the other hand, responds to the shared needs and goals of the entire group. In addition, the group process allows for a pooling of the rich resources within the group. And, perhaps most important, group supervision allows for the creation of a whole that is surely more than the sum of its parts.

The Value of Group Supervision

In their program evaluations, interns have consistently highlighted group supervision as a primary learning experience. They find the group support, sharing, and exchanging of ideas and strategies essential to their professional growth. They cite group supervision as a forum in which to practice their

future roles as educators. One 1979 graduate summed it up:

> Group supervision was a place to try out growing as a teacher, a team member, and a family liaison. It was a place of support and challenge. It was a place to be with other people who understood some of the things I was experiencing.

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